Arlington Public Schools

Department of School
& Community Relations

Communications Evaluation Report

Prepared by

McGinn
and Company

November 2017

Contents

    A. Individual Interview Questions

    B. APS Materials Review Inventory

    C. McGinn & Company Overview and Consultant Bios

    D. APS Internal SWOT Analysis (Completed by SCR staff, June 2017)

    E. 2016 Community Satisfaction Survey Key Findings

    F. 2017 SCR Focus Group Analysis (Hanover Research)

I. Introduction

As part of its ongoing commitment to improving communications with key stakeholders within and outside the organization, Arlington Public Schools (APS) contracted with McGinn and Company to conduct a communications evaluation. The overall goal of the evaluation was to assess the current effectiveness of APS communications from an outside perspective and recommend strategies for improvement and growth.

The APS communications evaluation included interviews with key personnel within and outside the Department of School and Community Relations (SCR), review of existing communications tools and recent survey findings, and review of focus group findings and recommendations conducted during the evaluation. While McGinn and Company offers a wide range of research services, focus groups were conducted by Hanover Research due to an existing agreement (See Appendix F for the focus group report from Hanover Research).

Headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, McGinn and Company is a full-service communications firm specializing in strategic communications, building brand loyalty, and managing complex challenges. The two consultants who conducted this evaluation have over 50 years combined experience working with a wide variety of organizations to evaluate and implement communications strategies (See Appendix C for consultant bios and more about the firm).

Situation Overview

Following is a brief overview depicting distinct characteristics of the Arlington area and APS, as well as the unique roles and responsibilities of SCR.

<u>Arlington, Virginia</u>, is a diverse, dynamic and professional community located about five miles from the center of the nation's capital. Arlington has a high quality school division that attracts a well-educated, high-income population. In fact, Arlington has the highest percentage of residents with a bachelor's degree or higher in the Washington, D.C. area. It is also home to a very diverse population, which necessitates communication in multiple languages, particularly Spanish. Residents support investment in education, as demonstrated by the amount spent to attract quality teachers and the money dedicated toward educating each student.

Key Statistics:
- Square Miles: 26
- Population: 222,800
- Median Household Income: $110,700
- Per Capita Income: $89,300
- Residents' Highest Level of Education:
  - Bachelor Degrees 72.9%
  - Graduate Degrees 38.4%

Arlington Public Schools is a diverse and inclusive school community, committed to academic excellence and integrity. The APS vision is to provide instruction in a caring, safe and healthy learning environment, responsive to each student, in collaboration with families and the community. The APS mission is to instill a love of learning in its students and prepare them to be responsible and productive global citizens.

Key Statistics
- Current enrollment 26,941 students (Sept. 30, 2017); expected to exceed 30,000 by 2020
- Ranks 13th largest among Virginia's 132 school divisions
- Richly diverse student population represents 122 nations and 100 languages
- Spends approximately $19,000 per child, the most per pupil in the region
- Ranks first in average teacher salary
- Average class size below the regional average
- Average SAT scores rank 3rd in the region

The Department of School and Community Relations' primary focus is to enhance communications within APS and between schools and the Arlington community. The department's mission is to ensure that students, staff, families and the community are informed about the news, activities, and positive contributions of public schools in Arlington; and that they have access to school news, opportunities and choices. SCR ensures that the community is invited to become involved in APS initiatives, get engaged in APS governance issues, and provide input on planning processes.

SCR responsibilities include management and oversight of:
- APS face-to-face communications
- Stakeholder engagement for community processes
- Public information and communication with families
- Media relations
- APS website
- Email communications with families and staff
- Social media
- Television and online video production
- Volunteers and partnerships with schools
- APS special events and employee recognition
- School-based PR liaisons, volunteer and partner liaisons, and webmaster liaisons who manage specific communications functions at each school

II. Report Scope and Components

The overall goal of the communications evaluation was to assess the current effectiveness of APS communications from an outside perspective and recommend strategies for improvement and growth.

Key objectives of the evaluation included:
- Review the range of internal and external communications initiatives (print, web, media, social media, events and engagement, public relations, and community events);
- Evaluate feedback from key stakeholders, including the 2016 Community Satisfaction Survey, individual interviews, and focus groups conducted by Hanover Research;
- Examine the current resources to support effective communications;
- Identify strengths and weaknesses and ways to improve communications; and
- Recommend strategies to refine and strengthen communications and heighten awareness, involvement and support for the work of APS.

McGinn and Company's role in conducting the evaluation included 10 primary components:
1) Introductory meeting with SCR to get a broad overview of the department, gain insights and agree on key components of the evaluation.
2) Work with SCR to make recommendations regarding focus group composition, questions and goals to Hanover Research.
3) Conduct materials review, assessing overall continuity and messaging.
4) Conduct individual interviews with key representatives of internal audiences.
5) Conduct individual interviews with School Board members.
6) Evaluate focus group findings to assess opinions, concerns and perceptions of external and internal key stakeholders.
7) Develop recommendations, strategies and tactics for enhancing communication with key audiences and for improving the function/management of APS communication activities.
8) Compile evaluation report.
9) Present key findings and recommendations.
10) Submit final report.

III. Key Findings

Across all interviews and focus groups discussions, it was evident that there is strong support for and pride in APS. All audiences recognized the challenge of communicating with a diverse group of stakeholders on a wide variety of communication topics and the high volume of communications managed by SCR.

Several strengths identified include:
- Talented and experienced team of communicators
- Very responsive to requests for help
- Excellence in crisis mode and media coaching
- Innovative liaison program
- High-quality print materials are graphically appealing and feature clear messaging and branding
- Strong framework of communications policies and procedures in place

The following key findings were identified as opportunities for APS to build on its current strengths and take its communications program to the next level.

Key Findings and Common Themes Across All Evaluation Components

- **An overarching theme across all audiences was the challenge of balancing the high volume of ongoing communication initiatives with daily demands.** There is a concern that important long-term priorities are often overtaken by more immediate day-to-day demands. Strategies are needed to help SCR staff manage the ever-growing level of expectations and to support school-based liaisons in their efforts to be more efficient and effective.

- **Issue-related communications plans are helpful; however, there is still a need to improve communications around controversial issues.** SCR has an excellent process in place for planning around controversial issues. Strategies are needed to help APS get out in front of the issue earlier with key information about how the process will work and how and when stakeholders can become involved in the process.

- **APS produces and distributes a high volume of information, but there is a desire for more targeted information that is filtered by stakeholders' need/desire to know**. As with all school divisions, APS needs strategies to make sure everyone who wants to receive information gets the right info at the right time in the right way—all without overwhelming them. Additional strategies are needed to better reach non-English speaking residents and people without email.

- **APS can benefit from additional branding and messaging.** One challenge faced by all school divisions is how to balance the identity of individual schools with division-wide

messaging. APS relies on principals to communicate to teachers and support staff. But, principals have their own communications priorities and division messages can get lost. APS needs strategies for increased branding and articulating its vision to make it relevant to the majority of families whose priority is their student(s) and school(s).

- **Stakeholders want more opportunities for input and to know how their input was used.** The "Engage with APS" feature on the website is a great concept, but many audiences did not know about it. Because this tool is relatively new (February 2017), it is important to promote its availability. Not only will it increase usage, but it reinforces the message that APS welcomes engagement with its stakeholders.

- **While great progress has been made in outreach to non-English speaking communities, there is more work to be done.** Since its last communications audit in 2006, APS has implemented several new initiatives to reach non-English speaking families. Additional strategies are needed to continue to make progress in this area.

- **While APS produces high-quality printed materials, other tools are difficult to navigate.** While APS printed material are clearly branded, attractive and easy to read, other tools, such as Peachjar and the APS website were described by many as difficult to navigate. Strategies are needed to gain feedback from intended audiences.

- **Teachers want to be more involved and included earlier in decision-making.** Strategies are needed to better utilize teachers as opinion leaders and tap into their close connection with students and parents.

- **Parents rely on communications networks outside APS to stay informed.** Parents rely on PTA or other listservs for information. Spanish-speaking parents use group texts and emails within their community to learn about events. Strategies are needed to tap into these other modes of communication.

- **School Board members want stronger division-wide messaging and a theme to garner more support for APS.** They also would like to see more proactive communications, especially around high visibility issues. Strategies are needed to arm Board members with messaging and tools to further the division's mission and improve consistency.

IV. Recommended Strategies

Based on the evaluation's key findings, following are recommended strategies for strengthening communications with APS stakeholders. It is important to note that these recommendations range from small items that can be quickly implemented, to larger more complex items that will require additional resources. SCR staff is already working at full capacity; therefore, these recommendations need to be considered in the context of existing workload, budget and priorities.

1) **Continue to refine the planning process.**
   This summer, SCR created the framework for a strategic communications plan (APS Strategic Communications Plan 2017-18 School Year). This plan should be further developed and refined until it becomes the guiding document for all SCR communication activities. We recommend including an overarching theme and broad key messages that reflect the direction and focus of the year's activities. Messages need to be clear, concise and memorable. In addition to key upcoming issues, the plan should include regular events/activities/recognition holidays that reoccur each year. This will ensure that ongoing communication efforts are not lost in larger issues and day-to-day demands that require immediate attention.

   To serve as a communications roadmap for the year, the plan should be approved prior the beginning of each school year and shared with other departments and school liaisons. Progress and messaging should be evaluated quarterly and updated as needed. As part of the evaluation process, be sure to include a section for additional activities/projects that were not part of the original plan, so they can be considered for inclusion in the following year's plan.

2) **Improve communications around controversial issues**.
   SCR already anticipates upcoming controversial issues and creates a communications plan to address each one. To make these plans more useful and effective, they need to address issues early and thoroughly. The goal is to get out in front of the issue to stop the rumor mill from being the primary source of information.

   A proactive message platform should be created to clearly explain the school division's position on the issue. The message platform should be used consistently among each stakeholder group and also be customized to address the concerns of each audience. The plan should also compile a list of challenging questions that are likely to come up from each audience, as well as answers that reflect key messages. The document should be shared with anyone at APS who is likely to communicate about the issue. Make sure to include teachers in the distribution.

   When communicating about controversial issues, it is important for stakeholders to feel that their concerns have been heard and addressed before final decisions are made. Therefore,

include in the plan opportunities for people to submit concerns electronically and/or at public meetings. Make sure to address concerns directly in your message platform and Q&A documents. Constituents will often give you the benefit of the doubt when they feel that you have listened to them—even if they don't agree with your final decisions.

<u>Communications training for controversial issues</u>
We recommend allocating funds for additional communications training for anyone who will be speaking on behalf of APS about controversial issues. When prepared for the tough questions, you can embrace the opportunity to set the record straight. For people who are going to do extensive communication, like the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents, and Board members, you might consider more formal training with an outside vendor who can bring in a camera and conduct mock interviews and critiques to improve skills.

We also recommend developing a "train-the-trainer" model to expand communications training to principals, teachers and staff as part of their professional development. The key is to get staff comfortable handling difficult, even hostile, questions about important issues. They must be skilled at facing the hard questions and responding directly in order for them to be considered credible sources. Remember that parents will most often approach their child's teacher to discuss an issue first.

3) **Prioritize information going out so people really pay attention.**
In the world we currently live in, most people are on information overload. Too many emails come into our work and home email boxes, and many people find it hard to keep up. This is particularly true for APS teachers, staff and families. Remember that you are trying to get the attention of people who are often working long days, commuting a far distance to and from work, and juggling the demands of family life. The best strategy that you can follow as a communicator is to remember that less is more.

SCR has plans to move to a more structured model with a new vendor that will allow them to better target messaging and be more creative in drawing attention to individual topics so that people can pick and choose what they read. Make sure each form of communication is message-driven so that you are telling people why something is important rather than just dumping information.

Use staff voicemails more sparingly. Long voicemails are cumbersome and frustrating to the listener because they can't skip ahead to what is really important to them. As a result, they often stop listening before the message is over and miss key information.

Whenever possible, use email communication or other existing tools. When using staff voicemail, save this option for only the most urgent of issues and lead off with a statement that includes the topic and length of the message. For example: "Hello, this is _____ with an important ___-second/minute message for APS staff about the incident that took place at _____ school today."

Ask for feedback from audiences frequently to gauge whether information is reaching them and whether it is helpful. When audiences have the opportunity to provide input, they know that you are trying to be a good communicator.

4) **Better communicate the overall brand/mission of Arlington Public Schools.**
In a division with 31 schools, it is easy for each school to fall into silo style communication whereby each communicates as its own school rather than communicating as part of the larger division.

It is important for APS to build an overarching brand so that families feel connected to it as their children move to other schools or boundaries change. This connection builds relationships and a team of advocates that can help APS be more successful.

As you are in the process of developing a new strategic plan, this is a good time to invest in creating a slogan and message platform for APS. A slogan offers a way to convey the district's overall purpose in a few words. It would be used in conjunction with the APS logo and be included on all communications from the division, as well as individual schools. Themes suggested during individual interviews included using words that suggest unity, such as collaborate, together, united, and one. Another theme was based on the fact that APS schools offer excellence in education and included words such as achieve, succeed, thrive, and excel. Slogan development done right requires a significant budget. A more affordable option, that would also gain support and build excitement, would be to offer a contest among students.

The message platform should communicate the school division's unique qualities and what is special about your approach to education. Much of this exists in your current materials, but it needs to be pulled out, tightened up, and placed in a strategic message platform that also has proof points and supporting data for each message. The platform should then be disseminated to all APS schools and used frequently by individual schools as each communicates to stakeholders. SCR could hold training for school liaisons on how to incorporate the division's message platform in all communication. In addition, look for additional ways to encourage school leaders to share information.

For better consistency of information shared by school principals, we recommend starting all communications with the top APS messages that need to be communicated, followed by a list of other activities and messages they can use at their discretion. Make sure the messages are as clear and concise as possible. Schools should also have minimal standards for communication that reflect APS standards (e.g., daily updates to social media, monthly newsletter, regular updates to their website).

Working with the School Board communications liaison and departments across the school division, we recommend consideration of the following branding/messaging tools:

- <u>10- to 15-minute PowerPoint presentation with talking points</u> (for use by Board members and other representatives when making presentations in the community).
- <u>30-second APS "state of the division" speech</u> for brief speaking opportunities/ encounters.
- <u>APS logo/brand identity</u> on all school materials and websites.
- <u>Message training</u> for APS representatives and Board members speaking on behalf of the division.
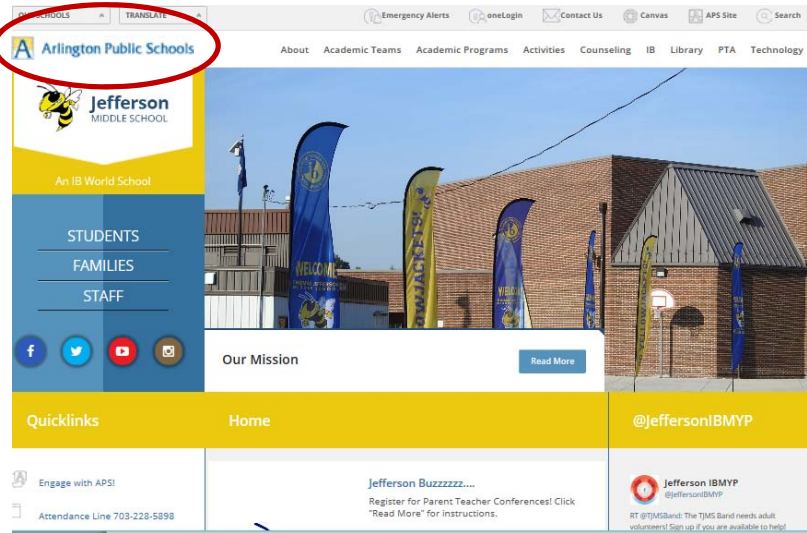
5) **Better explain the Department of School and Community Relations and its capabilities.**
   SCR is doing a lot of great work with a set amount of resources. For those who work in other departments across the school division, this is difficult to understand and can lead to frustration. To address the demand for a faster response to time-sensitive issues and prioritizing incoming requests, we recommend implementing a formal intake process. For each request, the designated SCR staff member would complete a brief intake form and route it to the appropriate staff member. The person making the request would immediately receive an automated response acknowledging the request and letting them know they will be contacted by an SCR team member within 1-2 business days. We also recommend implementing a tool for evaluating incoming project requests. The tool could consist of a few brief questions to assess the request within the larger scope of priorities:
   - Does it support one of the current/planned priority initiatives?
   - What is the impact of its usefulness (What is the reach? Can it be used again?)
   - Could it be promoted/communicated using existing vehicles, or does it need its own plan?
   - Is there a way to incorporate a feedback mechanism?
   - Are there other departments/stakeholders that would benefit, or benefit the project, by being involved in the planning process?
   - What is the most efficient and effective way for SCR to assist (e.g., provide a template, share examples, refer to vendor, etc.)?

   To inform other departments of the wide variety and scope of work produced by SCR, as well as who they should contact for assistance, we recommend wider distribution of the SCR resource directory.

6) **Increase communication around the message that input from stakeholders is valued**. Stakeholders need to know that their input is welcome and valued and how to provide it at the right time in the right format. The first step is to let people know what's already available by promoting the "Engage with APS" tool on the website. In the promotion (and on the website), be sure to tell people who their input is routed to, so they don't feel the need to write additional emails/letters. Also tell them when and how they should expect to hear back from someone. If possible, build in an immediate automatic response (thank you for your email) including when they should expect a personal response (2-3 business days). For people who don't have access to computers/the internet, distribute "Engage with APS" postcards at meetings and events. Include a phone number and make sure that each inquiry is promptly answered.

   For members of advisory or special committees, make sure they know their time and input is valued by sharing how their input was used. Hold a follow-up meeting or send a letter that not only thanks them for their time and contribution to the process, but tells them what was done with their input and why the final decision was made. While not everyone can get what they want, it's rewarding to know what they did was helpful and how it fits into the larger outcome.

7) **Close the communication loop by asking stakeholders if they are getting the information they need when and how they need it**. Evaluating what works and what doesn't and determining ways to improve are all important components of the communications effort. For regular publications like newsletters, this can be accomplished through a readership survey. For other materials, like issue-specific communication, use a low-cost/no-cost survey tool such as K-12 Insight. We also recommend more frequent use of the automatic survey tool for visitors to the APS website. Surveys should be brief and require no more than two to three minutes to complete. Conducting regular formal and informal research is key to understanding stakeholder opinions. Key findings from the 2016 Community Satisfaction Survey report 69% of APS families as being somewhat or very satisfied with how schools inform them of events, and only 56% somewhat or strongly agree that APS staff and families collaborate with local community members.
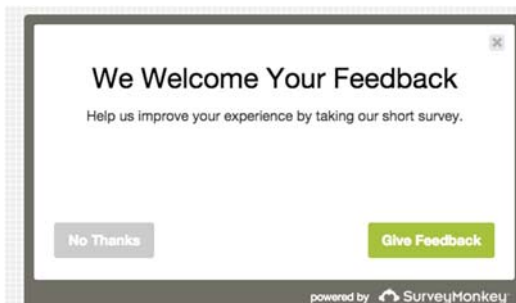
   For the 2018 Community Satisfaction Survey, consider adding two or three questions per audience that ask about specific APS communications tools. For example, the following statements would be rated on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, or don't know):
   • The APS website keeps me informed about important things happening in the school division.

- Community meetings help me understand upcoming issues.
- The APS *NewsReview* newsletter provides information I need.
- I'm aware of the "Engage with Us" tool on the website.

8) **Continue to expand outreach to non-English speaking families.**
Because Spanish-speaking parents make up the highest population of non-English speaking families in APS, two of the focus groups were conducted with Spanish-speaking parents. The feedback received from these groups was very specific about communication preferences. Although numerous communication tools are available, many Spanish-speaking parents were not aware of them or did not know how to use them. As suggested by one of the interviewees, SCR could work with schools to develop an "Engage 101" workshop for Spanish-speaking families. The workshop would not only inform parents of available means of communication, but actually help them sign up/register and use them. Additional ways to increase outreach to Spanish-speaking parents include:
- Expanding translation services for the district.
- Using more printed materials in Spanish.
- Using SchoolTalk to targeting Spanish-speaking parents with voicemail messages read by Spanish speakers and text messages translated in Spanish.
- Continuing to identify leaders/originators of group texts and emails within their communities; developing ambassadors who can share information.
- Creating a Facebook group for Spanish-speaking parents.
- Making sure they know there's a translation button on the website and they understand how to use it. Also help them to understand how and when to use "Engage with APS."
- In focus groups, Spanish-speaking parents highlighted the need for follow-up and reminders. These needs should be worked into the schedule of any outreach plans.

9) **Involve teachers and other staff members earlier in the decision-making process and better utilize their frontline communication with students and parents**.
It is important to utilize the vast network of 4,000 employees who are already communicating directly with students and families each day. Arm them with talking points and Q&As on important issues. Provide district information tools, such as "Engage with APS" postcards, for distribution when parents show up for meetings/events. Research shows that there is increased readability when communication comes from the principal/teacher; evaluate when it would be appropriate to use this option.

Be sure to involve teachers and other staff members early in the decision-making process. Be sure teachers are represented on committees and advisory groups and ask them to gain input from their peers and report back to them.

10) **Help school liaisons be more efficient and effective.**
The addition of PR, volunteer and web liaisons in the schools was a brilliant idea and one that has been successful in achieving a greater communications presence at every school. The largest challenge is the limited time liaisons have outside their primary jobs to devote to

McGinn
andCompany

their duties. Therefore, it is important to make it as easy as possible for them. SCR is already sharing information effectively with the liaisons. Whenever information, including plans about controversial issues, can be shared early, it is always better to give them as much lead time as possible. It is also important to continue to share templates with the liaisons to make their jobs more turnkey.

APS might also benefit from making it easier for liaisons to interact with one another and share best practices. It seems they would welcome the opportunity if it could be done without adding another meeting to their already busy schedules. This could be accomplished by incorporating time for networking/idea sharing into quarterly training. Another possibility is to create a group online chat where liaisons can share what's working and issues they are facing, as well as ask questions. This could also be a place where they can inform the SCR about issues or areas where help is needed.

As another avenue for feedback, consider adding a question to the liaisons' quarterly review that asks, "How can SCR help you in your role?"

11) **When assessing resources, consider return on investment.**
If the opportunity arises for additional staffing resources, we recommend adding a new liaison position in schools that could take on a high priority area like outreach to non-English speaking families. The school liaisons could report to one of the two communications coordinators currently not assigned to a liaison group.

Another option is a bilingual information coordinator based in the SCR office to take calls and monitor website inquiries, possibly offering online chat assistance. This would allow SCR to promote the information line and better interact with people who do not have access to email or computers.

12) **Continue to refine and assess communications tools**.
APS communications tools contain strong graphics and branding. For the most part, printed materials are attractive, easy to read, and include photos portraying a happy, diverse student population.

Following are recommendations for specific communication pieces:
- APS 3-5 Year Action Plan (printed piece) is difficult to decipher and includes 12 years of planning information. Because APS is in the process of developing a 6-year plan, it is recommended that the 3-5 Year Action Plan document be replaced with a document that outlines what is being done to finish out the current plan, as well as the process for the upcoming strategic plan—how it works, and how/when stakeholders can provide input.
- Communications targeting community members without school-age children (e.g., ARLI Members Senior Card) should be maximized by including key APS messages, promoting volunteer opportunities and how to "Engage with APS."

- <u>School events</u> with large attendance, like the arts, sports and other competitions, provide a great opportunity. Use these events to communicate key messages with families and community members in attendance.
- <u>Website</u> feedback included comments about it being difficult to navigate. One solution would be to include a pop-up message offering assistance, like "Need help? Call _____." Or, if possible, offer an online chat option.
- <u>Voicemail messages</u> should be short and clearly identified as a message from the school division. Target non-English speaking parents with messages in their own language, whenever possible.
- <u>Community conversations</u> provide the opportunity to communicate with stakeholders who are not engaged through email. Consider offering "Coffee & Conversation" at a convenient location (go to them) once a month to communicate key issues and ask for feedback.
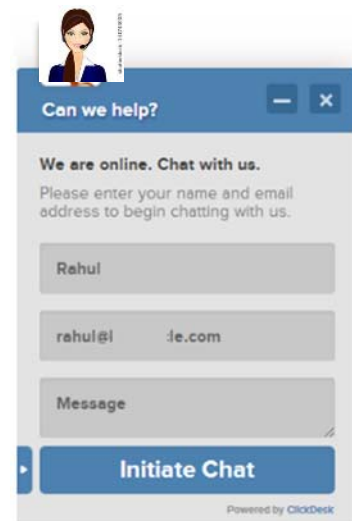
13) Provide School Board members with tools to support APS communications.
Because Board members are not working directly in the division's day-to-day operations, strategies are needed to ensure they are armed with the information and tools they need to be most effective in their role and as they respond to their constituents. Keys to their success include:
- Strong communication between Board members, the superintendent, staff, and each other. These relationships work best when based on mutual respect, strong collaboration and commitment to student success.
- A communications structure that allows for less time spent on operational issues and more time focused on policies and actions to meet APS goals and ultimately improve student achievement.
- Communication tools to help them inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders.

Recommended strategies include:
- Offering a mixture of learning activities, including, retreats, professional development, work sessions, school visits and even social events for Board members alongside the superintendent and assistant superintendents.
- Spokesperson training/messaging to help Board members communicate APS goals and initiatives.
- To better meet the challenge of communicating information to the Board at an appropriate level, consider developing a 5-slide template (challenge, solution, action steps) and presentation tips to help presenters deliver messages in a clear and succinct way.

V. Appendix

    A. Individual Interview Questions

    B. APS Materials Review Inventory

    C. McGinn & Company Overview and Consultant Bios

    D. APS Internal SWOT Analysis (Completed by SCR staff, June 2017)

    E. 2016 Community Satisfaction Survey Key Findings

    F. 2017 SCR Focus Group Analysis (Hanover Research)

APPENDIX A. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<u>Board Members</u>
- How would you describe the overall effectiveness of APS communications?
  - Strengths?
  - Weaknesses?
- What does the department need to function more efficiently/effectively?
- What were your biggest communications challenges in the past year?
  - Were they effectively handled? What could have been done better?
- What do you foresee as the biggest communications challenges for the upcoming school year? Do you feel adequately prepared and equipped to handle them?
- Thinking of APS communications in general:
  - Do you feel as though you are reaching stakeholders with your messages and moving them to action?
  - Are messages clear and consistent? Is everyone aware of key messages and speaking in One Voice?
  - What communications have been most effective?
  - What could be improved?
- Are there communications opportunities you are missing?
- If there is one thing APS is known for, what would you want that to be?

<u>Superintendent</u>
- How would you describe the overall effectiveness of APS communications?
  - Strengths?
  - Weaknesses?
- What were your biggest communications challenges in the past year?
  - Were they effectively handled? What could have been done better?
- What do you foresee as the biggest communications challenges for the upcoming school year? Do you feel adequately prepared and equipped to handle them?
- Thinking of the next 3-5 years, what are your priorities for APS communication?
- Thinking of APS communications in general:
  - Do you feel as though you are reaching stakeholders with your messages and moving them to action?
  - Are messages clear and consistent? Is everyone aware of key messages and speaking in One Voice?
  - What communications have been most effective?
  - What could be improved?
- Are there communications opportunities you are missing?
- If there is one thing APS is known for, what would you want that to be?

<u>Internal Communications Staff</u>
- How does the department do on internal communications—amongst the staff?
- What could be done to improve internal communications/processes?

- How does the department stay on track with priorities while taking on new assignments (method for task evaluation?)
- How does the department evaluate which current activities should be maintained, and what activities may not advance strategic goals and could be abandoned or de-emphasized, and where some resources might be redirected?
- Regular formal and informal research, knowing the system, understanding the problems, seeking stakeholders' opinions, evaluating what works and what doesn't, and determining how the system can improve are all important components of the communication effort.
- Do all employees have an accurate, consistent "elevator speech" about your organization? Do you speak as One Voice?

APS Communications Evaluation Report

APPENDIX B. APS MATERIALS REVIEW INVENTORY

Title	Content Summary	Format Received	Date Published
Internal Communications Staff SWOT Analysis	1 page chart resulting from internal staff assessment	Word Doc	June 2017
3rd Quarter Department Report (latest available)	Progress report on Department's SMART Goals for the year. Summary of top goals/priorities.	Word Doc	April 2017
Weekly Editorial Calendar Updated every Monday after a short meeting (30 min) to prepare for communications priorities and tactics for the week. Shared with PR liaisons, School Board, executive leadership team, and all administrators.	Planned social media posts by day, new hashtags, media, School Talk, homepage posts, face-to-face meetings/events, communications plans by issue, videos	PDF	June 2017
Review Evaluation Forms (3) Used to review the work of school liaisons	Goals/tasks checklist used for quarterly evaluation	Word Doc	N/A
2016 Community Satisfaction Survey Results https://www.apsva.us/planning-and-evaluation/evaluation/surveys/community-satisfaction-survey/2016-community-satisfaction-survey-results/	Includes Key Findings, Parent Survey Results, Community Survey Results, Staff Survey Results, Student Survey Results; Covers a variety of areas, including communications	Link	2016
Personalized Digital Learning Communications Plan	Sample communications plan (issue/event/project specific)	PDF	
College and Career Night	Sample communications plan (issue/event/project specific)	PDF	2016
Social Media Guidelines Memo	Memo to Executive Team, Principals and liaisons outlining social media guidelines	PDF	Feb 2017
APS process for approval/distribution of backpack mail (distribution system for outside organizations)	Policy for distribution of outside materials to Arlington Public Schools (APS) students	PDF	2016
Job Descriptions for Communications Staff: • Assistant Superintendent, School & Community Relations	Job descriptions	Word Doc/ Hard Copies	N/A

McGinn and Company

• Director of Communications • Communications Coordinator (Media relations and online strategies) • Communications Coordinator (Webmaster and Design Services) • Communications Coordinator (Family Engagement and Public information) • Communications Coordinator (Volunteers, Partnerships and special events) • Television Producer I			
Job Descriptions for school liaisons: • PR Liaison • Volunteer & Partnership Liaison • Web Liaison		Hard Copies	
Communications Process Circles	Two graphics depicting communications processes for internal and external communications	PDF and Hard Copies	
Public Relations Liaison Manual— for school-based PR liaisons responsible for helping to promote APS	36-page guide includes writing tips, style guide, sample crisis communications talking points	PDF and Hard Copy	2016-17
APS Communications Options	2-page document outlining available communications tools/tactics/ways to reach audiences	Word Doc	N/A
Advertising & Content Guidelines for School-Sponsored Publications and Multimedia Platforms		Word Doc	2016
Department of School and Community Relations Org Chart	1 page/slide with SCR Org Chart	Power-Point and Hard Copy	
Communications Plan Template	For use in creating communications plans for projects/events/issues	Word Doc	
Department of School & Community Relations: Contacts & Functions	List of names and contact information for APS school and community relations	Word Doc and Hard Copy	

McGinn and Company

Superintendents Annual Report 2017 This year's Superintendent's Report for Dr. Murphy that will become this year's "APS Annual Report" later this summer		PDF	
APS 3-5 YEAR ACTION PLAN	Key initiatives and activities planned for APS, by key audience	PDF and Hard Copy	
First Day packet forms and important documents for 16-17 School Year	Forms, Student Handbook, Homeless Education Program, Family Life Education Letter, Application for Free/Reduced Meals, Student/Family Access to Medical Insurance Info Letter, FY2017 Budget Info Brochure, Connecting with Our Community Flyer, Library Digital Content Letter, Child and Family Services Behavioral Healthcare Flyer, Outdoor Lab Envelope, Friends of Arlington Planetarium Envelope	Hard Copy	
Guidebook for Parents: Welcome to Elementary School (also available for Middle and High School)	Registering your student for the 2017-18 School Year	Hard Copy and Link	
APS 2015-16 Academic Highlights	Year in Review	Hard Copy	
APS Economic Value for Arlington County	1 page summary of economic impact	Hard Copy	
4-yearolds Pre-kindergarten Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) 2015-16	What it is and how to apply (1 side English/ 1 side Spanish)	Hard Copy	
Attention ARLI Members—request your APS Senior Card Now	Free opportunities for Arlington Seniors to stay involved any resident age 60+ can attend any APS school event free of charge, including athletic events, music/theatre productions, etc.	Hard Copy	

McGinn andCompany

2016 School Bond	4 page (2 English/2 Spanish) document re: vote to approve $138M in School Bonds to address growing capacity needs throughout Arlington County	Hard Copy	
Sample Briefing Reports: School & Community Relations Briefing Report June 2017 Advisory Council on Instruction Mid-Year Report 2016-17 Graduation Task Force Briefing Paper January 2017 Library Services Briefing Report Feb 2017		Hard Copy and Link	
NSPRA Communications Audit Report – APS	Last communications audit conducted	Word Doc	March 2006
Google Alert https://www.arlnow.com/2017/07/07/demolition-underway-at-wilson-school-site-in-rosslyn/ https://www.arlnow.com/2017/06/28/jay-fisette-reflects-on-legacy-future-challenges-in-final-state-of-the-county-address/	Recent news coverage	Link	July 2017
Today Show segment -- Anti-bullying PSA created by Williamsburg Middle School staff with 7th grader with Tourette Syndrome	Ran story in biweekly Parent Newsletter, and quarterly Arlington County Community Newsletter, The Citizen. Picked up by local and national affiliates, including: • WJLA (local ABC affiliate) • CBS Evening News (national) • Arlington Magazine • National Tourette Association Original story – 5,100 Likes and 16 shares Local Channel 7 story – 5,600 Likes and 115 Shares; CBS Evening News story – 3,800 Likes and 4 shares	Link	Fall 2015 - June 2017

Past APS Annual Reports https://www.apsva.us/publications/annual-reports/	Link to past annual reports	Link	N/A
Engage with us Web page: https://www.apsva.us/engage/	Details of key issues and invitation to share thoughts through: email, online form, call, sign up to speak at Board meeting, join advisory committee	Link	N/A
Major APS Publications: https://www.apsva.us/publications/	Includes: • APS Handbook (E&S) • Guidebook for Parents – Elem., Middle and H.S. (E&S) • Quick Facts (1 page) • *NewsReview*- biweekly listing of information about Arlington Public Schools • The Citizen, bi-monthly newsletter produced jointly by APS and Arlington County • Annual Reports- brief overview of accomplishments and bright spots throughout the school year • 2016-17 Briefing Reports- quick snapshot of yearly progress for departments • The Changing Face of Arlington--exploration of the history of desegregation and diversity in Arlington Public Schools over the last six decades	Link and Hard Copies	
Administrator Entry Plans: https://www.apsva.us/entry-plans/	Incoming administrators share their goals, aspirations and strategies for their new schools/APS	Link	

Staff Newsletter (NewsCheck): https://www.apsva.us/post/aps_page_group/news-check/		Link	
APS Family Newsletter (NewsReview): https://www.apsva.us/post/aps_page_group/news-review/		Link	
APS Video Programs: https://www.apsva.us/snapshots/ https://www.apsva.us/aps-green-scene/ https://www.apsva.us/digitalaps/ https://www.apsva.us/volunteers-partnerships/partners-in-action/ https://www.apsva.us/plans/wholechild/ https://www.apsva.us/aetv/historical-markers-video-series/		Links	
Printed Materials Policy: https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/legacy_assets/www/f54dd629d3-30-3.2_printedmaterials.pdf	Link to policy for distribution of printed materials	Link	
Acceptable Use of Social Media: https://www.apsva.us/wp-content/uploads/legacy_assets/www/5a606c6b06-20-2.215-acceptable-use-social-media-PIP.pdf	Link to social media policy for APS staff; includes form to list social media that will be used in the classroom and requires signature	Link and Hard Copy	
APS Strategic Communications Plan (DRAFT)	Draft plan outlining communication strategies for the year	Word Doc	2017-18
SCR Department Plan for FY2018	SCR goals aligned with the APS Strategic Plan		July 2017

APPENDIX C. MCGINN AND COMPANY OVERVIEW AND CONSULTANT BIOS

McGinn and Company is a full-service communications firm headquartered in Arlington, VA, and specializing in strategic communications, building brand loyalty, and managing complex reputation challenges. Over the course of 30 years, the McGinn companies have had extensive experience working with clients in a wide variety of industries and organizations, including universities, law firms, government agencies, non-profits, trade associations, and more than a third of the Fortune 100.

Dan McGinn is the founder and CEO of McGinn and Company. When the issues are front-page news and the public debate is raging, Dan and his team are often engaged by counsel and top executives. Over the past 30 years, Dan has helped premier clients navigate such hot-button issues as the childhood obesity problem facing beverage companies, product liability cases with the pharmaceutical industry, sports scandals within universities, environmental issues impacting natural resource companies, and the massive restructuring of the American automobile industry. A testament to the firm's skills and commitment, virtually all of McGinn and Company's clients are referral-based.

Marjorie Brown is a Senior Vice President at McGinn and Company. She has more than 28 years of experience in strategic communications, crisis communications, public relations, executive coaching and broadcast journalism.

Prior to joining McGinn and Company, Marjorie worked for GolinHarris. She managed accounts and directed the agency's global communications training program for more than 11 years. She has prepared hundreds of senior executives for presentations and for media interviews. Before signing with GolinHarris in 2000, Marjorie worked for Dan McGinn under his previous companies of Ryan McGinn and Weber McGinn. During that time, she helped launch a successful communications training practice.

Marjorie previously served in the administration of Governor George E. Pataki as director of public information for New York's Department of State. She directed the communications and public information office for New York Secretary of State Alexander F. Treadwell and his 800-person department. She was Secretary Treadwell's chief media spokesperson and worked closely with Governor Pataki's press office to formulate media strategy for the administration. She represented the administration in numerous media interviews with New York City and statewide media.

Marjorie was previously an account executive and media specialist for Sawchuk Brown Associates, one of upstate New York's leading public affairs firms. She began her career as a television news anchor, reporter, and producer. At WTEN-TV (ABC) in Albany, New York, she worked as a general assignment street reporter and newscast producer. She was also news director and evening news anchor at W08CJ-TV in Glen Falls, New York.

Dora Leonard is a Consulting Partner at McGinn and Company. She has more than 25 years of experience in strategic planning, crisis management, internal and external communications, media relations and marketing. Dora utilizes her successful track record and wide range of experience to help clients navigate complex issues and provide communications solutions.

At McGinn and Company, Dora counsels clients in complex situations and provides advice on strategic development, crisis and reputation management, spokesperson training and targeted outreach.

In addition to serving in leadership roles for two of the Washington DC area's leading public relations firms, she led the public relations and marketing activities of two healthcare organizations.

Over the past decade, Dora has been actively involved in advancing education in South Carolina. She is actively involved in the State School Improvement Council (SIC). In 2016, she was named State SIC Advocate of the Year. In 2017, she was elected to the State SIC Board of Trustees. She also serves as a member of the State Superintendent of Education's Parent Advisory Council.

APPENDIX D. APS INTERNAL SWOT ANALYSIS (Completed by SCR staff, June 2017)

What is the current condition? (This step could also be called a gap analysis.) *(Describe key findings from the department's analysis of available informational sources. Example sources include but are not limited to: the SP Scorecard, Department Scorecard, External Scan, and literature reviews. Organize your thinking in SWOT format.)*

SWOT Analysis	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
What do we consider to be the strengths? What advantages do we have? What do others say our strengths are?	What do we consider to be our weaknesses? What are we most criticized for or receive the most complaints about? What do we seem to have a hard time doing well?
- We have multiple established communication channels for sharing news about APS with families. - Our APS leadership (School Board, Superintendent, ELT) values and supports communications. - We have a clear vision and set of priorities for communicating with the APS 3-5 Year Plan. - Collaborative and well-trained department staff who have a good reputation within the school division. - Efficient, reliable network of communicators and internal capacity to communicate good news about APS. - Creativity and storytelling in our work - understanding how to leverage it through our various channels.	- We don't communicate enough about what's important to all of our audiences --- families, students, staff & stakeholders - SCR gets diverted to the urgent issues and has trouble staying focused on important long-term priorities. - Instead of building more capacity among administrators, we have fostered their dependency upon our expertise. - Not enough time spent on evaluation of our work regularly to seek improvements & be strategic in purpose. - Proactive promotion of our video projects. - Not enough communication on behalf of departments, minimal collaboration with departmental contacts. - Pre-event coordination for all staff and after-action reports on events are needed.
Opportunities	**Threats**
What opportunities for improvement do we know about but have not addressed? Where, with a little work, could we change a weakness into a strength?	Who or what threatens us the most? What challenges are coming that we must respond to? What might block our progress?
- New planning communications staff to provide support. - Focus messaging on outcome/impacts. - Robust intranet & SCR ownership of staff communications.	- Stakeholders don't always like the messages we communicate. - Small but vocal minority influence perception of communications. - Board priorities can be divergent. - Engagement fatigue can occur with multiple projects.

McGinn and Company

- Motivation Mondays changed to Terrific Tuesdays (to increase declining social media engagement) - Regular standing meetings with departments for updates/more interface with all after move to Syphax - Make improvements to liaison training (esp. digital media) - Re-energize Newscheck and News Review content - Staff training for Peachjar uploaders - Expand Community Engagement listserve - Gather & implement NSPRA best practices	- Budget cuts could cut into staff and program capacity - Public and staff perception of "secrecy" or lack of transparency - Complexity of issues management - Decline in civility in community debates "Win-lose" mentality with school vs community leaders

McGinn
andCompany